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ABSTRACT

Rural schools have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers. In light of this problem, advertisements for special education tenure-track assistant professor positions were analyzed to ascertain whether teacher education programs are addressing the need for rural special education teachers. A total of 397 advertisements in the "Chronicle of Higher Education" for the 1994-95 and 1995-96 academic years were analyzed in two major areas: characteristics of the teacher education program for which the faculty member was being recruited; and the descriptors used to characterize the successful applicant. The advertisements showed a lack of emphasis on meeting special education teacher needs in rural areas: of the 397 ads, only 6 mentioned rural areas; 21 addressed teacher preparation at remote sites; 18 mentioned teacher preparation through distance education; and only 1 discussed alternative certification programs. Four tables present data on advertisements listing expertise in preparing special education teachers to work in rural or urban settings, additional descriptors related to expertise in preparing teachers to work in rural settings, strategies to meet teacher education needs in rural settings, and frequency and percentage of advertisements requiring expertise in preparing teachers to work in rural or urban settings with descriptors about school services or programs. Study limitations include lack of review of actual programs, lack of nonadvertised information about the positions, and lack of information about successful applicants. Contains 19 references. (SAS)

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A DISCUSSION OF THE ROLES OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS

Though there is no agreement on either the definition of a rural area or the number of schools in rural areas, there is consensus that schools in rural areas have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified teachers (Gold, Russell, & Williams, 1993; Lemke, 1994; Ludlow, 1996; Merrell, et al., 1994; Savelsbergh, 1995; Williams, Gold, & Russell, 1995). Schools in rural areas have responded to the needs of children with disabilities in various ways, including the: (a) use of itinerant teachers (Luckner & Miller, 1994); (b) formation of educational cooperatives (Rojewski, 1990); and (c) formation of partnerships with businesses and individuals in the community (Lemke, 1994; Ludlow, 1996; Rojewski, 1990). Each of these solutions has accompanying problems associated with it. For instance, in relation to providing itinerant services, certified teachers spend a great deal of time traveling between schools and students on their case load (Luckner & Miller, 1994), and experience logistical problems with materials, space, and scheduling (Ludlow, Bloom, & Wienke, 1990; Morsink & Lenk, 1992).

Regardless of the strategy used by schools to serve students with disabilities, institutions of higher education have attempted to respond to the personnel needs of schools in rural areas in numerous ways: (a) using a teacher education model that requires faculty to travel to remote sites where preservice students have gathered from rural areas for courses needed for certification (Ludlow, et al., 1990; Merrell, et al., 1994; Savelsbergh, 1995); (b) developing alternative certification programs (Sindelar, 1995; Zumwalt, 1991); and (c) implementing distance education programs through the use of technology (Bowden, 1994; Ludlow, 1996; Lundin, 1994; Shrestha & Sutphin, 1995-96; Williams, et al., 1995).

No matter which method of service delivery a university chooses to meet the teacher shortage problems faced in rural areas, teacher education programs must be comprised of faculty who have the expertise required both in the use of instructional methods employed in the program (i.e., high technology distance education; collaboration with local personnel) and in specific areas of expertise in special education and teacher education. In addition, teacher education programs may need to (a) target preservice students from rural areas (Gold, et al., 1993; Starlings, Wheeler, & Porterfield, 1994); and (b) address the unique needs of teachers in rural areas (Lemke, 1994; Luckner & Miller, 1994; McLaughlin, Valdivieso, Spence, & Fuller, 1988; Williams, Gold, & Russell, 1991). One measure of whether teacher education programs are addressing the need for teachers in rural areas is the extent to which these needs are mentioned in advertisements for faculty at institutions of higher education. The purpose of this study was to analyze advertisements for special education tenure track assistant professor positions for mention of expertise in the provision of educational services in rural areas as being either required of the successful applicant or addressed by the teacher education program. In addition, the content of advertisements was analyzed for other major descriptors of the successful applicant and program to provide a profile of positions that addressed teacher education needs in rural areas.

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Method

Advertisements in the Chronicle of Higher Education for the 1994-95 and 1995-96 academic years were analyzed. Academic years were defined as starting August 1 and ending July 31, correlating with the time frame during which prospective faculty members most likely would be seeking a position for the following academic year. Advertisements which specified that the successful applicant not be required to have a terminal degree were discarded, as well as those positions which were advertised as temporary, grant funded, or part time.

Analysis of advertisements was conducted in two major areas. First, the analysis addressed characteristics of the teacher education program for which the faculty member was being recruited. Second, the analysis addressed the descriptors used to characterize the successful applicant. For this study, areas of descriptors included: (a) disability category (e.g., mental retardation; multiple disabilities); (b) level of disability; (c) age-related expertise; (d) other areas of expertise; (e) focus on school setting; (f) rural and urban personnel needs; (g) collaboration among special and general education faculty; (h) presence of a unified teacher education program; (i) provision of educational services in inclusive settings; and (j) collaboration with schools. Advertisements were analyzed independently twice and results from these analyses were compared. Any discrepancies which occurred were addressed and consensus reached.

Results

During the 1994-95 academic year, 195 advertisements for assistant professors in special education appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education. Of these advertisements, eight (4.0%) specified that the successful candidate should have expertise in either rural or urban education settings (see Table 1). Two advertisements required rural education expertise, while six advertisements required expertise in urban education settings. During the 1995-96 academic year, 202 advertisements for assistant professors in special education appeared. Of these advertisements, 20 (9.9%) required the applicant to have a successful background in rural or urban education settings. Four of the advertisements specifically required educational expertise in rural settings, while 16 required educational expertise in urban settings. Combining the academic years of 1994-95 and 1995-96, 28 (7%) of the advertisements (n=397) specifically required the successful candidate to have expertise in either rural settings (n=6, 1.51%) or urban settings (n=22, 5.54%).

Of the identified two advertisements in academic year 1994-95 which specified a rural education expertise component, both used other descriptors for the successful applicant. One included the descriptor of mild/moderate disability level, and the other included the descriptor of emotional disturbance as a category of disability.

The four advertisements identified as containing a rural education expertise component during the academic year 1995-96 also included additional descriptors for the successful applicant. One included emotional disturbance as a category of disability alone; two included only age-related expertise (i.e., one in infant/early childhood special education and one in secondary/transition); and one included mental retardation and secondary/transition expertise.

Overall, six advertisements for both years included teacher education needs in rural settings. Of these, one (16.67%) described the successful candidate as having additional expertise in level of disability (mild/moderate). Two (66.67%) had an additional descriptor of expertise in a category of disability, and two mentioned age-related expertise (33.33%).

Both category of disability and age-related expertise were mentioned as additional areas of expertise in two (33.33%) of the advertisements.

For the time period examined, no advertisements indicated a preference for other areas of expertise such as general education, generic special education, or bi-lingual special education. In each academic year, one advertisement required expertise in diverse populations. In academic year 1994-95, distance education through the use of technology was not addressed in conjunction with rural special education expertise. During academic year 1995-96, three (75%) of the advertisements included descriptors for the use of technology in distance education, one advertisement included the use of technology in the area of expertise (25%), and one advertisement (25%) required knowledge of e-mail technology (see Table 2).

In relation to strategies to meet teacher education needs in rural settings, 10 advertisements (5.13%) included descriptors related to remote site instruction during academic year 1994-95 while 11 of the advertisements (5.45%) from academic year 1995-96 contained these descriptors (see Table 3). Only one advertisement (0.50%) included a descriptor related to an alternative certification program for academic year 1995-96. No such descriptors were included in advertisements for academic year 1994-95. Distance education using technology was included as a descriptor in 7 (3.59%) of the advertisements for academic year 1994-95, with the number increasing to 11 (5.45%) for academic year 1995-96.

During the academic year 1994-95, two (100%) of the advertisements that required expertise in preparing personnel to work in rural special education settings included a descriptor related to the provision of educational services in inclusive settings as well as collaboration with schools (see Table 4). While academic year 1995-96 evidenced an increase in the number of advertisements incorporating expertise in rural special education (n=4), there was a decrease in the number of advertisements that required expertise in inclusion (1; 25%), and collaboration with schools (1; 25%). When advertisements for the two academic years were combined (n=6), three (50%) included a descriptor about inclusion, while two (33.33%) incorporated collaboration with schools.

Discussion

Although the results of this study present a clear snapshot of the lack of emphasis on meeting teacher education needs in rural areas, it must be noted that there are several limitations in the present study and in the manner in which the findings can be interpreted. First, while advertisements for new faculty in teacher education programs were analyzed, the actual programs were not reviewed. Because of this, conclusions cannot be drawn about the extent to which teacher education programs actually address the needs of rural areas; conclusions can only be drawn about the manner in which advertisements address these concerns. Future researchers may investigate teacher education programs to determine whether they meet the needs of rural areas. Second, no additional information about the advertised positions or the teacher education programs which may have been obtained by potential applicants via verbal or written communication, was obtained or reviewed. Since information initially available to potential applicants in advertisements was analyzed, no information from individuals who developed the advertisements, or the teacher education program faculty, was analyzed. Because of this limitation, no conclusions can be drawn about the degree to which the content of the advertisements match either the actual requirements of the anticipated successful applicant, or the program's emphasis on meeting the teacher education needs in rural areas. A final limitation to the study is the lack of information about the new faculty members who successfully applied for the positions advertised. Because of this, no conclusions can be

drawn related to the match between the content of advertisements and the expertise of successful applicants. Further research is needed to address all of these limitations before any additional conclusions can be drawn.

In spite of these limitations, some issues are clear from the present descriptive study. Since 67% of schools nationally are in rural areas and there is a shortage of teachers in rural areas (Lemke, 1994), and the number of U. S. Office of Education initiative priorities that address needs related to education in rural areas, it is disconcerting that of the 397 advertisements for special education assistant professors appearing in the Chronicle of Higher Education (a) only six (1.51%) mentioned rural areas, (b) only 21 (5.29%) addressed teacher preparation at remote sites, (c) only 18 (4.53%) mentioned teacher preparation through distance education, and (d) only one (0.25%) discussed alternative certification programs. It is interesting to note that advertisements for only one institution of higher education mentioned both the needs of rural areas *and* either remote site instruction, alternative certification programs, or distance education, and that this institution consistently did so in three advertisements across both years.

Failure to include in faculty advertisements the expertise required to meet the teacher education needs of rural areas may reflect two situations. First, the advertisements may not accurately reflect all of the requirements for the successful candidate or all descriptors for the teacher education program; that is, positions that are advertised may actually require the successful candidate to have expertise, and an interest, in rural teacher education activities but the advertisements may not incorporate these concepts. This may be the result of many issues, including: (a) advertisements being developed by individuals who are not intimately involved with the teacher education program; (b) the teacher education faculties lacking consensus on or the knowledge of the degree to which needs in rural areas should be emphasized; or (c) the current faculties not wanting to limit the pool of applicants to only those with expertise in rural teacher education needs. In any of these situations, with the current emphasis on meeting teacher education needs in rural areas, institutions of higher education may want to consider including the *possibility* of the new faculty member participating in remote site instruction, alternative certification programs, or distance education programs in advertisements for new faculty. Even this minor mention of the *possibility* may encourage doctoral candidates to develop expertise in meeting the teacher education needs of rural areas, and leadership programs to facilitate the development of that expertise.

Second, advertisements actually may reflect all the requirements for the successful candidate and all descriptors for the teacher education program. If this is the case, various issues become evident. Most importantly, this could indicate that teacher education programs either: (a) are not systematically addressing the needs of rural areas; or (b) currently have faculty already meeting those needs and, therefore, are not seeking additional faculty with the same expertise. Given the continuing shortage of certified teachers in rural areas, it is difficult to accept the latter possibility without further research to support it. If the former possibility is the case, there may be several contributing factors. For instance, institutions of higher education may be hesitant to incorporate instruction in remote sites into their existing teacher education programs for viable logistical reasons: (a) the amount and expense of travel could be considered prohibitive; (b) faculty may be overextended in order to cover the courses already required on campus; (c) university systems dealing with faculty FTE and credit hour loads may not be adaptable to compensate faculty for the time required to travel to and from remote sites; or (d) stay overnight for multiple day classes.

In addition to logistics, institutions of higher education must be responsive to their mission, whether legislated by state governments or directed by separate boards of regents.

The traditional faculty responsibilities of providing service, conducting research, and teaching are made more complex when considering the role of teacher education programs. Most are charged with decreasing a state teacher shortage by preparing teachers to provide education services that reflect current best practices for school districts across the state, not just in rural areas. The mission of any institution of higher education may be so expansive that it prohibits a teacher education program from focusing on the needs of just one region of the state - in this case, schools in rural areas. Given the nation's current economic situation and the management concept of "do more with less" which is prevalent in many states today, the mission of many institutions of higher education is expanding in scope and becoming more encompassing, while resources are diminishing. In such a climate, specific issues which face schools in rural areas may be overlooked or the efforts to address these issues may be diluted. This especially may be true for states in which the number of student credit hours leading toward a degree have been limited by state legislatures or boards of regents, or in which institutions of higher education mainly are located in urban/suburban settings, limiting students' experiences in rural settings.

In relation to the development and provision of high tech distance education programs, institutions of higher education may lack the actual technology required for effective interactive video-conferencing and video-instructing. Even if the technology is available, institutions of higher education may lack the ability to financially support the faculty time required to develop distance education courses or learn how to use the technology effectively. In addition, some course content may not lend itself to effective instruction through distance education. Such content might include the practice of assessment, instruction, and collaboration techniques, all of which require observation in educational situations and individualized feedback. More information is needed related to the efficacy of distance education in preservice instruction.

If the advertisements provide an indication of the expertise required of successful candidates, then it can be inferred that little is being done to meet the unique teacher education needs of rural areas. A concerted effort must be made to address this situation. To support such efforts effectively, however, solutions must be found to address the barriers faced by institutions of higher education. Because of this, the quality of services for students with disabilities in rural areas warrants intensive investigation.

Table 1: Advertisements Listing Expertise in Preparing Special Education Teachers to Work in Rural or Urban Settings

	Rural		Urban		Total	Percent of Total Advertisements
Year 1 n = 195	2	4.03%	6	3.08%	8	4.10%
Year 2 n = 202	4	1.98%	16	7.92%	0	9.90%
Both Years N = 397	6	1.51%	22	5.54%	28	7.05%

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Table 2: Additional Descriptors With Expertise in Preparing Teachers to Work in Rural Settings

	Year 1 n = 2		Year 2 n = 4		Both Years n = 6	
Other Areas of Expertise						
General education	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Generic special education	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Bi-Lingual special education	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Diverse populations	1	50.00%	1	25.00%	2	33.33%
Technology						
In teaching	0	0.00%	3	75.00%	3	50.00%
In area of expertise	0	0.00%	1	25.00%	1	16.67%
Email	0	0.00%	1	25.00%	1	16.67%

Table 3: Strategies to Meet Teacher Education Needs in Rural Settings Included in All Advertisements

	Year 1 n = 195		Year 2 n = 202		Both Years n = 397	
Remote site instruction	10	5.13%	11	5.45%	21	5.29%
Alternative certification program	0	0.00%	1	0.50%	1	0.25%
Distance education	7	3.59%	11	5.45%	18	4.53%

Table 4: Frequency and Percent of Advertisements Requiring Expertise in Preparing Teachers to Work in Rural or Urban Settings with Descriptors about School Services and/or Programs

	Year 1 n = 2	Year 2 n = 4	Both Years n = 6
Inclusion	2	1	3
Percent of advertisements with descriptor that incorporates inclusion	100.00%	25.00%	50.00%
Percent of all advertisements for special education assistant professors	1.03%	0.50%	0.76%
Collaboration among special and general education faculty	2	0	2
Percent of advertisements with descriptor that incorporates collaboration	100.00%	0.00%	33.33%
Percent of all advertisements for special education assistant professors	1.03%	0.00%	0.50%
Unified teacher education program	0	0	0
Percent of advertisements with descriptor that incorporates unified program	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Percent of all advertisements for special education assistant professors	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Collaboration with schools	2	1	3
Percent of advertisements incorporating collaboration with schools	100.00%	25.00%	50.00%
Percent of all advertisements for special education assistant professors	1.03%	0.50%	0.76%

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